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Controller Unveils Open Data Website on Local Government Finances

City, County Spending and Borrowing Made More Transparent

SACRAMENTO – State Controller John Chiang unveiled a new open data website today, listing more than 13 million fields of financial data for cities and counties as part of his ongoing efforts to promote transparency in government. The site, ByTheNumbers.sco.ca.gov, makes it easier for taxpayers to track revenues, expenditures, liabilities, assets, fund balances and even basic statistics about each city and county.

"We're moving government accountability and transparency out of the analog dark ages into the digital era where information about how much your city or county is spending and borrowing is available with a keystroke," Chiang said. "By providing balance sheet details for every California municipality on one website and allowing users to slice and dice the information to spot trends and analyze spending, I hope to empower communities to become more involved in civic decision-making."

The site's financial information currently covers an eleven year period -- from fiscal year 2002-03 through 2012-13 -- and was provided by California's 58 counties and more than 450 cities. Depending on public interest, data for preceding decades will be incorporated into future upgrades to the website.

"The State Controller's new open data website is a significant step in enhancing transparency in government at all levels. It provides the public with the tools to better understand and engage in our government process," said Matt Cate, Executive Director of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC). "We applaud the Controller for utilizing state-of-the-art technology to develop a tool that puts valuable public information right at the fingertips of our residents."

"The Controller's announcement today of the ByTheNumbers website is an important and positive step forward in helping the public be more engaged in important policy decisions by their local governments," said Chris McKenzie, Executive Director of the League of California Cities. "This new website will complement the open data and related transparency efforts of cities across the state. We commend the Controller for finding an effective way to make key city financial data much more accessible and useful to taxpayers and local agencies alike."

As required by law, the Controller's Office has been collecting and publishing this data in seldom-used paper form since 1911. The new website makes it easier for communities to look up data, download raw numbers, create charts and search for other financial data by offering dropdown menus that will allow users to drill into more

specific financial information. In significantly greater detail than offered in the previous paper reports, the new website covers funds received and spent by California's local governments, as well as property they own and amounts they owe.

The Controller elected to construct the ByTheNumbers website using an "open data" format that allows information to be viewed, downloaded, converted into charts and shared. The website will be updated annually with new information received from local governments.

Later this fall, the Controller will introduce major upgrades to the website that will not only include additional tools and features based on user feedback over the coming months, but will also provide data for each of California's approximately 130 pension systems. The pension data will include: assets and liabilities; additions to plan assets, such as employer and employee contributions; deductions to plan assets, such as benefit payments and administrative expenses; statistics on the number of active, inactive and retired members; net return on investments and actuarial funding.

In addition to ByTheNumbers.sco.ca.gov, the Controller invites users to visit PublicPay.ca.gov, which includes pay information for public employees, as well as TrackProp30.ca.gov, which helps taxpayers track every dollar raised by Proposition 30 for public schools.

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